



Food for People

The Food Bank for Humboldt

Food Notes

*The Newsletter of
The Food Bank for Humboldt*

“Stamping Out Hunger” with Your Local Letter Carriers: 25th Annual Letter Carriers Food Drive

By Casandra Kelly, Local Food Resources Coordinator

Each year on the second Saturday in May, the National Association of Letter Carriers hosts a nation-wide food drive to “Stamp out Hunger,” in partnership with local pantries and food banks. Saturday, May 13th marked the 25th Annual Letter Carriers Food Drive, the largest single-day food drive in the nation. We asked all residents of Humboldt County to participate by leaving donations of nonperishable food items by their mailboxes. Our amazing local Letter Carriers Union and rural Post Offices partnered

closely with Food for People and our network of pantries to coordinate the pick-up and delivery of nonperishable food donations throughout the county.

The food received through this annual drive helps Food for People replenish the shelves of our local food pantries, many of which have already distributed donations gathered over the holidays. The food collected during the Letter Carriers Food Drive is therefore critical in our efforts to provide hunger

relief for low-income residents during the summer months, when school children are without the meal assistance provided during the school year and struggling families are in need of help. For the fifth year in a row, we used blue, pre-printed donation bags in our outreach efforts, and worked with letter carriers to have them distributed to mailboxes throughout the county during the week leading up to the drive, to make it easier for folks to donate.



Continued on page 4 A local letter carrier delivers bags





Mission Statement

Food for People is working to eliminate hunger and improve the health and well-being of our community through access to healthy and nutritious foods, community education, and advocacy.

Our Vision

We envision a community where everyone has access to good quality, nutritious food, understands the consequences of hunger and poor nutrition and is committed to creating a stronger, healthier Humboldt County.

Our Values

- **Integrity:** We will demonstrate the highest ethical standards in all interactions.
- **Stewardship:** We will be accountable to all through the efficient and environmentally responsible use of resources.
- **Teamwork:** We will foster cooperation and a sense of empowerment amongst our diverse staff, volunteers, and community partners.
- **Respect:** We will treat all of our relationships with respect.
- **Innovation:** We will continually seek to provide excellent service through the development of new and improved methods to reduce hunger.
- **Empathy, Passion, Empowerment:** We encourage and support the best in ourselves and those we serve and provide opportunities for

FOOD FOR PEOPLE'S UPCOMING SCHEDULE SNAP

Free Seasonal Produce Markets: May – October

Food for People hosts free farmers market-style distributions at four locations in Humboldt County. October:

- Food for People** (307 W. 14th St., Eureka) – Every 3rd Thursday from 12pm-2pm
- Fortuna Community Services** (2331 Rohnerville Rd.) – Every 3rd Wednesday from 12pm-2pm
- Garberville Presbyterian Church** (437 Maple Ln.) – Every 2nd Tuesday from 12pm-2pm
- Redway Baptist Church** (553 Redway Dr.) – Every 2nd Tuesday from 12pm-2pm

Children's Summer Lunch Program: June 19th – August 1st

When the school year comes to an end, Food for People and our partners offer a Children's Summer Lunch Program. Free lunches are provided to children and their families who cannot afford the additional cost of the extra meals once school is out. For more information and to find a Summer Lunch site visit www.foodforpeople.org/programs/children's-summer-lunch.

CalFresh Awareness Month: May

May is CalFresh Awareness Month, during which individuals and organizations work to increase awareness of CalFresh and dispel myths about the program. CalFresh helps improve the well-being of qualified households and individuals by providing improved access to healthy foods. Currently in Humboldt County, 20,603 participants are enrolled in CalFresh. Over \$10 million in benefits are being spent monthly at local stores and markets.

Gleaning Season: May – October

While we glean extra fruits, vegetables, and other locally raised foods from farms, the height of the gleaning season is May through October. If you are interested in gleaning from your garden, or would like to volunteer to help us harvest extra produce from local orchards, please visit www.foodforpeople.org/programs/gleaning-program.

Senior and Homebound Program Drivers Needed: May – October

Our Senior and Homebound Delivery Program provides monthly bags of food to seniors who are unable to leave their homes. As summer begins and our school volunteers take breaks, we are in need of additional volunteer delivery drivers. If you are interested, please visit www.foodforpeople.org or call Philip at (707) 445-3166 extension 310.

Choice Pantry in Eureka: Year-round

Our Choice Pantry emphasizes both choice and a balanced diet. People "shop" for their food through a selection process much like they would in a grocery store, rather than receiving pre-selected food. The Choice Pantry is located at 307 W. 14th Street, Eureka, and is open Monday through Friday, 9:00am-4:30pm (Scheduling is done on Monday's for appointments Tuesday through Friday).

Countywide Pantry Network: Year-round

Our Emergency Food Pantry Network provides food for 17 pantries and four soup kitchens throughout Humboldt County. For a list of locations and schedules, visit www.foodforpeople.org/programs/emergency-food-pantry-network.

Mobile Produce Pantry: Year Round

Our Mobile Produce Pantry is a refrigerated truck that travels to many remote communities and sets up a free fruit/vegetable farm stand on a monthly schedule. It is housed in the Humboldt County DHHS Mobile Engagement Vehicle, which offers an array of services. For a full list of locations and schedules, visit www.foodforpeople.org/programs/produce-pantry.

To see a full list of our hunger relief programs visit www.foodforpeople.org.

Notes from the Director

By Anne Holcomb, Executive Director

"If you've seen one food bank, you've seen one food bank." That was a phrase I heard repeated several times this past week, as members of my staff and I attended the first ever convening of remote, rural California food banks. The focus of the convening was to review the results of a needs assessment conducted by the Nutrition Policy Institute (NPI) at UC Berkeley. Ron Strohlic, a member of the NPI team, traveled to 14 of the 15 food banks serving rural areas of California (the 15th was undergoing a major transition in leadership) to meet with their executive directors and key staff to talk about capacity needs specific to warehouse operations, program development, staffing, volunteer involvement, board development, transportation,

fundraising and licensing and certification requirements. The results were presented at the April 30th convening in Sacramento and our goal was to discuss and prioritize follow-up actions that would help strengthen our rural network.

One of the things I'd like to emphasize about this convening is that my rural and remote colleagues and I (and our respective staff) rarely have an opportunity to connect in person to share our collective wisdom and challenges. We are very different from our urban counterparts in this regard. Our remote locations and the costs and difficulty involved in traveling to each other's food banks represent significant barriers to meaningful

engagement, despite the fact that we always glean so much useful information when we do have an opportunity to connect. That's why the funding provided through the California Association of Food Banks (CAFB) to conduct the needs assessment and bring us all together for the convening was such a big deal. It was great to transcend our email relationships and meet in person, forging deeper connections that we hope will lead to stronger regional collaborations in the future. We crammed a lot into our one day together, and as a board member of CAFB and co-chair of the Remote, Rural Food Bank Committee, it was very gratifying to see 15 years of advocacy work on behalf of our network come to fruition.

Sheryl, who was also a plenary speaker at the CAFB biannual conference, which took place on May 1st and 2nd. She is very direct and inquisitive, and she asked compelling questions about each of our operations. It was refreshing to meet a woman who is a player on the world stage and also connects with and supports the realities we deal with daily. I was also impressed by Sheryl's 13-year-old niece, who accompanied her for the meeting. She let us know that she and her mother (a pediatrician) have been volunteering regularly at a food bank over the past several years, and she is applying what she's learned and observed as she explores her own thoughts about how to address issues of hunger and poverty.

I would also like to extend our heartfelt thanks to a key CAFB donor who helped make this all possible: Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, provided funding for a pilot-project to secure affordable protein products for CAFB members and enthusiastically endorsed our proposal to conduct the needs assessment and convene our remote, rural partners. I was

Celebrity connections aside, I also have to comment on the sense of pride I felt about Food for People and all we have accomplished over the years. We've been forced to be creative in our efforts to serve approximately 10% of our county's population in a service area that spans almost 4,000



25th Annual Letter Carriers Food Drive *Continued from page 1*



Donations from the National Association of Letter Carriers "Stamp Out Hunger" Food Drive are delivered to Food for People.

Thanks to the extraordinarily hard work of our local letter carriers and the generosity of the community, this year's Letter Carriers Food Drive was a resounding success, bringing in tens of thousands of pounds of food throughout Humboldt County to help our friends and neighbors in need. In honor of the 25th Annual Letter Carriers "Stamp Out Hunger" Food Drive, we sat down with one of our local letter carriers, Suzanne "Bones" Stafford, to talk about the importance of this food drive. Here is what she had to say:

On the second Saturday of May - People put donations of non-perishable food in or at their mailbox for the mailman (or mail lady!) to pick up. This is THE biggest single-day food drive in the U.S., and the more we can collect the better off Humboldt County's food pantries will be heading into the lean summer months. It's an easy way to make a big difference.

This is the 25th year doing this food drive. Have you seen the campaign change or grow over these years?

Yes! With each year the mechanics of the "Stamp Out Hunger"

leading up to the second Saturday in May have a huge impact on the amount of food collected. In Humboldt County, we've consistently seen a 40% increase in donations once we started using the "Stamp Out Hunger" bags.

In your view, how has this food drive helped with hunger relief in Humboldt County?

Almost all food banks get their donations during the holidays, when giving is on people's minds. So when May rolls around almost all food pantries start to run dry; that's why the National Association of Letter

at this same point in the year, as the school year - and its lunch programs - comes to an end. I think the seasonal nature of much of Humboldt County work contributes to the need right here close to home, to restock those pantry shelves. Timber, fishing; those are industries with a lot of down-time, when a family isn't necessarily bringing home a paycheck. The food bank helps get people to that next check and beyond.

What makes the partnership with Food for People special, unique or beneficial?

How much room do I have? Seriously, though, Food for People has been helping the Humboldt County Letter Carriers of Branch 348 stage a successful "Stamp Out Hunger" food drive for many years now, and that working relationship pays off. Not only the [purchasing of the] blue donation bags, but Food for People's outreach to our smaller post offices has paid off big, especially for those communities. Re- Dell, Garberville, Blue Lake; they've all seen increased donations over the years thanks to Food for People working with us and the food pantries that serve

Letter Carriers *Continued from page 4*

Coast Co-op, Murphy's Markets, John's Cigars, Country Club Market, Coldwell Banker Cutten Realty, Umpqua Bank, Wildberries Marketplace, Ray's Food Place, Broadway UPS Store, Eureka Veteran's Clinic, Pierson Company and Pan Dulce Steel Orchestra. We would also like to thank the local business Old Town Coffee & Chocolates, Los Bagels, Mia Bella Cupcakes, Slice of Humboldt Pie, and Smug's Pizza for their donation of delicious food for Letter Carriers and Volunteers on this busy day.

If you missed your letter carrier, you may drop your donation off

Monday through Friday at Food for People, 307 W. 14th St. in Eureka, or you can contact a food pantry in your local community. A list of Food for People's Pantry Network locations and their schedule of operating hours can be found online at <http://www.foodforpeople.org/programs/emergency-food-pantry-network>.

For more information about this or other food drives, please contact Food for People's Local Food Resources Coordinator Casandra Kelly at (707) 445-3166 extension 312 or ckelly@foodforpeople.org. ~

Heartfelt thanks to the 25th Annual Letter Carriers' Food Drive sponsors!



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Intern Spotlight: Maria Leandro

By Philip Anzada, Volunteer and Direct Services Manager



Maria Leandro has been an amazing social work intern at Food for People for the past nine months, and has donated almost 450 hours of service throughout her internship. She has worked primarily with our Senior and Homebound Programs and our Choice Pantry at Food For People in Eureka, where she has been able to touch countless lives through her compassion and dedication.

"Working with senior citizens and families who struggle to buy groceries has made a huge impact on me," explains Maria. "I have learned how to build meaningful relationships with our clients, and I know this

Through her work, she has been able to assist with senior distributions throughout the county, delivered food to homebound seniors in need, and she is a lead volunteer in our Eureka Choice Pantry. She has been willing to go above and beyond in her work, even as her internship ends.

After she graduates, Maria is attending Hunger Action Day in Sacramento to tell our client stories to legislators at the capitol. She has been a rock for staff members and volunteers alike, and we will miss the constant warmth she brought to the food bank. We are confident that she will continue to grow into a wonderful

Volunteer Spotlight: Gordon Leppig

An Interview with a Long-term Food for People Volunteer

By Zack Rouse, Community Food Programs Coordinator

I began working at Food for People in February, coordinating the Community Food Programs, which serves Senior and Homebound individuals in need. In my time here, I have already met many great people from all walks of life who generously give their time and energy to the community through our work. We have some wonderful long-term volunteers who are truly dedicated to the mission and practice of Food for People, and I am inspired by them every day, truly.

One of these champions of food equity is Gordon Leppig. Recently, I had the distinct pleasure to begin working with Gordon, one of the longest-running volunteer delivery drivers we have. Sleet or shine, like clockwork, his route gets done every month. He has seen a number of senior and homebound food coordinators over the years, and has gracefully transitioned from coordinator to coordinator over the course of 25 years and counting.

Food for People is a dynamic, growing and vibrant nonprofit, and as I settle in to my position here I

is to maintaining food security for our community.

In the past week, I've had the opportunity to correspond with Gordon, and asked him some questions about his experiences volunteering through the years. Below are his thoughtful and inspiring responses. I'll look forward to working with Gordon into the future, and I know that our clients appreciate his - and all of our volunteers' - involvement on a visceral and necessary level.

How long have you been involved with Food for People, and what got you interested?

We have been supporters for over 25 years, and our Family - Me, Julie Neander and our kids Kai and Sylvie - have been delivering for the Homebound Program since 2001. We started out doing it because we wanted to raise our children with a sense of responsibility and active engagement in their community, and as a means to actively help others. I think it has enriched all of our lives greatly, by allowing us to get to know folks with which we may not normally interact: by

grateful for what you have; and in knowing that if we ever needed help there would be organizations like Food for People to lend a hand. Once Kai and Sylvie started driving, they would often do the deliveries themselves. And even today, after moving away, they continue to help out with deliveries when they come home to visit.

Tell us about your volunteer role at Food for People. What is it like being a delivery driver for our Senior and Homebound Programs? What does your shift look like?

We pick up the food at the food bank and deliver it primarily to homebound people in McKinleyville and Arcata. But over the years we have had many regular deliveries in Trinidad, Westhaven, Fieldbrook, and even Eureka. We typically deliver to seven to ten homes and it can take one and one-half to two hours.

What kind of impact does the food seem like it has in the lives of people you deliver to?

It is obvious that many in our community deal with food scarcity on a regular basis. We have delivered to many



Food for People volunteer Gordon Leppig delivering food to homebound seniors and individuals.

delivery. Numerous times people have told us that they were out of food, or nearly so, and that we, showing up at their door with groceries and fresh produce, were a real God-send. I know it has had a big impact in many people's lives, and that we have helped alleviate hunger in our

Spring Gleaning

By Casandra Kelly, Local Food Resources Coordinator

While gleaning may be making a comeback in the rest of the U.S., here at Food for People it is already commonplace. Gleaning comes from the ancient practice of leaving food in the fields for the poor. Modern day gleaning works to prevent food waste and helps feed those in need in our communities. Through our Gleaning Program, nutrient-dense foods are made readily accessible for those who would not normally have access to fresh produce or those who live in food deserts.

Last year's gleaning efforts brought in more than 95,000 pounds of fresh fruits, vegetables and meat from local growers and ranchers to help the low-income households we serve. Last season, we took fruit tree donations a step further, and worked closely with our Nutrition Education

Program to use excess fruit for canning workshops Master Food Preservers hosted for our clients. This project helped us not only to save fruit from being wasted, but also offered community members the skills to start preserving extra food in their own homes, to help ensure that more people can enjoy the benefits of Humboldt County's produce bounty year-round.

We hope to outdo ourselves again this season, but we need your help to keep our Gleaning Program going strong! You can play a significant role by just doing one of the following:

1. **Plant-A-Row** of food. Do you like to garden? Part of Food for People's Gleaning Program is made up by our local "Plant a Row for the Hungry" campaign (PAR for

short), and involves local residents who garden at home or in community garden plots. Each year we ask our gardening community to consider planting a little extra in their gardens and share the excess bounty with the people we serve by donating it to Food for People or one of our local pantries. Add your garden to the Food for People database for future harvests by clicking on the link to our crop donation form at www.foodforpeople.org/programs/gleaning-program.

1. **Harvest** with us. A significant portion of our gleaned donations come from gardeners and farmers like you! Contributions from these producers account for two thirds of the total pounds collected annually through our Gleaning Program and provide some of the greatest diversity and variety

of produce for our programs. Help us harvest extra crops from fields or pick up extra produce that hasn't been sold. There are many different volunteer opportunities from Arcata, Eureka, McKinleyville, Fortuna and even out to Shivel and Willow Creek! Scheduling is flexible and some projects can be done on your own time.

2. **Donate** seeds, soil or plant starts to be distributed to other local Plant-A-Row gardeners, or donate funds to help purchase new equipment to make harvests go smoothly.

3. **Like our Facebook** page at www.facebook.com/PARHumboldt to see photos, updates, and volunteer harvest opportunities!

Over the years, numerous donors have brought in veggies,



Volunteer Spotlight: Gordon Leppig

Continued from page 6

they are no longer clients. Others we have delivered to for more than 10 years. We have had many clients over the years that passed away while in the program. That is a hard thing. All the clients are in great need.

What keeps you volunteering after all these years?

It always feels good being at Food for People making these deliveries. We know we make a real difference in people's lives. There is nothing quite like delivering food to someone who really needs it. Volunteering has been a great way for us to take ourselves out of our daily needs and desires (and complaints), and more clearly see the needs of others in the community in a more direct and in-depth way. Volunteering for Food for People has helped make us more empathetic. It is one of our favorite community organizations.

Thanks go out to Gordon and the Leppig/Neander family for their consistent and long-term support of the seniors and homebound clients who we serve monthly! Volunteers are the lifeblood of Food for People, and our community is much improved by their continued dedication to helping those in Humboldt County who



Longtime Food for People Volunteer Gordon Leppig picks up food bags to deliver to low-income homebound seniors and folks with disabilities in our community.

for People's Senior and Homebound Programs, contact Zack Rouse at (707) 445-3166 extension 303 or

Going the Distance: Child Nutrition



Longtime Food for People supporter of Red Pearl Racing will "Race" recumbent bicycles. This award their race to raise funds for a Sandy who is a health educator cause is Food for People's Backpack provides children in need with on Fridays during the school letting people in the community them—no matter what their social faculty and the infrastructure experience that kids that grow growing up not being invested to make a small investment and



Nora Wynne, a local teacher School, ran her first full marathon year and decided to make it a Child Nutrition Programs. Nora "Many families at my middle school bank, which always reminds me As I logged the long miles, I delivered for hungry kids in my community for Food for People. I kept feeling am afforded, because I am still

Mobile Produce Pantry

By Heidi McHugh, Community Education & Outreach Coordinator



Clients of all ages enjoy a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables provided by the Mobile Produce Pantry in rural and remote communities throughout Humboldt County.



“Can you believe it? Mushrooms!” That’s something we hear when we are lucky enough to have locally grown mushrooms to distribute at Food for People’s Mobile Produce Pantry. Since 2012, our refrigerated truck has been stopping all over Humboldt County to set up a free produce stand to increase access to fresh produce in remote areas. Transportation, challenging household budgets, and limited access to food retailers are the most common barriers our clients experience in trying to access healthy foods. Our Mobile Produce Pantry strives to reduce these barriers in two ways: bring fresh produce directly into the community and connect households in need to CalFresh - a nutrition assistance program that helps income-eligible

foods like fresh fruits and vegetables at local stores and farmers’ markets throughout the rest of the month.

CalFresh is a powerful tool in the effort to improve community health. More than 20,000 Humboldt County residents receive CalFresh benefits, 35% of whom are children. According to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, CalFresh kept 806,000 people out of poverty in California, including 417,000 children per year on average between 2009 and 2012. The Mobile Produce Pantry travels alongside the Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Service’s Mobile Engagement Vehicle (MEV) which offers an array of County services, including applying

eligibility, how to use benefits, and to offer application assistance.

We connect Mobile Produce Pantry visitors to the benefits of CalFresh as a step toward reducing food insecurity and improving community health. Food demonstrations and taste tests using the produce offered that day, plus recipes and tips on how to eat healthy on a budget, are provided by Food for People’s CalFresh Nutrition Education Coordinator and the Department of Health & Human Service’s Healthy Communities Physical Activity and Nutrition Program. We often have produce items that aren’t as well-known to many, such as rutabagas, parsnips, daikon radishes, leeks

providing recipes, inspires people to embrace the new!

Many conversations about cooking occur as shoppers pick out their produce. Those who know how to cook everything under the sun share their knowledge. Community members often come back the next month to tell us about ways they have incorporated some new vegetable or fruit from the Mobile Produce Pantry into other recipes. Last week, we offered local grown mushrooms that everyone was curious about. I pulled out my smartphone to identify and learn about these mushrooms: Enokitake and Trumpet. We talked about ideas for cooking them, and the mushrooms went

Locally Delicious: Helping Local Farmers and the Food Bank

By Casandra Kelly, Local Food Resources Coordinator



Fresh produce from local farms is purchased for Food for People's programs through the Locally Delicious Food Fund.

As we approach the warm season here in Humboldt County, the fruit trees are relentlessly blooming, reminding us of the summer to come. Thoughts of ripening peaches, bursting heirloom tomatoes, and the crisp cool crunch of lemon cucumbers come to mind.

Folks are toiling away at their gardens large and small. Farmers till in their fields and spring foods are planted. The 2017 growing season is underway, and Food for People is looking forward to another year of contracting with local farmers through the Locally Delicious Food Fund, established in partnership with local nonprofit Locally Delicious.

With help from Locally Delicious for the past seven seasons, Food for People has been able to contract with Humboldt County farmers to grow

established in 2010 by the authors of *Locally Delicious: Recipes and Resources for Eating on the North Coast* and *Lunch Box Envy: An Adventure in Healthy Eating for Kids and Families*. The authors, also known as the Heirloom Tomatoes, are advocates of local food production, as well as making local food accessible to everyone. Each year, they generously contribute to the Locally Delicious Food Fund, in conjunction with annual matching funds from St. Joseph's Health System, and this year, from the McLean Foundation as well. Combined with community donations, this year's fundraising efforts collected more than \$22,000 for the Locally Delicious Food Fund!

Food for People contracts with farmers, providing funds to them upfront in the

In exchange, farmers agree to grow specific crops for the food bank that season. In addition to working with returning farmers, Food for People also reaches out to new and upcoming farmers, to encourage increased food production in Humboldt County. The Locally Delicious Food Fund uniquely accomplishes two goals: supporting new and seasoned small-scale farmers who help sustain our unique local food system, and contributing to the health and wellness of our neighborhoods and communities through access to healthy produce.

This season's contracts are currently in development and we are looking forward to a bountiful year. Just some of the produce items provided through the program last season included kale, chard

beets, kohlrabi, leeks, turnips and more. The wide array of fresh, locally grown produce provided through the Locally Delicious Food Fund helps promote health and increase fruit and vegetable consumption for the people we serve. Our Nutrition Education and Outreach team offer great resources, tips and ideas on how to prepare these foods in a tasty and healthy manner. Food for People will also be making local produce available for our kids' cooking classes, inspiring the next generation of cooks and healthy eaters.

The benefits of the Locally Delicious Food Fund extend well beyond the people we serve. Our local farmers benefit by receiving income at the beginning of the season when they need it most, stimulating the local

Backpacks for Kids; Weekend Hunger Relief for School Fortuna Spotlight

By Carrie Smith, Child Nutrition Education Coordinator

Food for People's Backpacks for Kids Program operates countywide, providing bags filled with kid-friendly food every Friday during the school year to 569 children who are considered at risk for hunger. In the Fortuna area we currently serve 104 students at four schools including Toddy Thomas, South Fortuna Elementary, Fortuna Middle School, and Ambrosini. Each week, a pallet of food is delivered to South Fortuna Elementary, where Americorps members at the Fortuna Family Resource Center help to unload. Every Friday, members of the Fortuna and Fortuna Sunrise Rotary Clubs help to pack the bags. The Rotary Clubs also play an integral role in funding the program in the Fortuna area, doing fundraising and grantwriting throughout the year.

Aimee Dube is the Assistant Coordinator for the Fortuna Family Resource Center, through the Fortuna Elementary School District, and helps to coordinate the Backpacks for Kids Program in Fortuna. In hopes to learn a little more about the Backpacks for Kids Program in the Eel River area, I asked Aimee some questions about her role in the

experience from receiving food to take home on the weekends:

How do you identify families for the Backpacks program?

Through the Resource Center I learn of families that would benefit from the Backpacks program. I usually have conversations with the parents and help them fill out the form in order to enroll. I also get referrals from teachers, secretaries and school counselors.

Can you tell us about some of the families you work with? What are their lives like?

Families that I work with are all in different places. Some are families that are in a difficult living situation, either being without a permanent, stable home, couch surfing or staying in a motel. Some families have both parents working, but it's not enough to last all month long. Some are single parents or parents with disabilities who utilize CalFresh or our local food pantries. Some families have two kids, and some have six. It really depends, but food insecurity can happen in a variety of situations for a variety of reasons.

Can you tell me about the kids? How does the stress in their

qualify for free and reduced price lunch at school, which means they usually eat free breakfast and lunch Monday through Friday. The weekends can be hard if maybe your parent is working, or you don't have a place to cook, or even maybe don't have food to cook. For kids this can be really stressful, even if they don't realize it. Being able to eat healthy food regularly helps kids get ready to learn and to be able to be in class and focus on school rather than thinking about food or maybe feeling sick.

How do the children and families feel about Backpacks for Kids?

Kids that receive the backpacks are usually really grateful for what they get in the bags on Fridays, because they are full of snacks and meals that kids like. They usually don't need an adult to help them eat an applesauce or open a granola bar. They always get a loaf of bread and something hearty also, like soup or chili. Kids and their parents are happy about this program because it's helpful in a very practical way, and it's easy to pick up the bag at school.

Have you seen any changes in the children?

Teachers tell me that



Fortuna Family Resource Center

not need so much snacks on Monday morning, or they're a little more energetic and ready to go in the mornings. It really has great benefits for the children, as we all know: when we are fed, we're much happier.

Have you seen any change in the need for this program since it began?

I know that every year our numbers are increasing. And I don't know if that's because more families need it than they ever have or if it's that we are able to provide more than before and are just now meeting more of the need. Either way, I'm grateful that we have such support not only from Food for People but additional financial sponsors as well: Fortuna and Fortuna Sunrise Rotaries, the McLean Foundation, and Youth Engaged in Philanthropy (YEP) have been amazing at meeting the need in our community. We also

'Are You Crazy, Lady?': The Joy Of Introducing New Foods to Hesitant Children

By Heather King, CalFresh Nutrition Education Coordinator

With all the grief my child gives me about certain foods, I continue to be surprised by how much she is willing to help **cook** them. For instance, my daughter can't stand cooked vegetables of any variety, but will consume raw vegetables by the handfuls. Stirring a pan full of onions and peppers; listening to the magical crack and sizzle of oils popping; and smelling the full-bodied aroma of garlic and spices; apparently has little to do with eating it for her... or does it?

Let's think about this for a moment. The comprehensive taste experience is more than just the explosions of bitter, sweet, sour, salty and umami on our tongues. It involves smell, texture, appearance and touch. If that is the case, then, my child is "tasting" foods by cooking them – or at least introducing herself to the idea of a fuller taste experience down the road. I have found that, over time, the more she interacts with a food, the more likely she is to try it. In all reality, that's fair. After all, don't we, as adults, ask what is in a new dish before tasting it? The difference with children – especially young children – is that

adults, so it's likely their sensory experiences with food are much stronger. Seeing unfamiliar foods being cooked and enjoyed, then, can help children be less weary.

As Food for People's CalFresh Nutrition Education Coordinator, I teach a children's cooking and nutrition class at the Jefferson Community Center once a month for their afterschool SEEDS program. Ages range from age six to ten, and I have been able to apply these wider conceptualizations of taste there. Even if children believe they will not like eating a certain dish, they are almost always enthusiastic about preparing it. I make sure the experience is as hands-on as possible. It's fun to measure, to get a little dusty from flour; to get sticky from mixing oats and fruit and honey; for the oldest children to help the littlest ones push up their sleeves; to make a random assortment of ingredients blend into a delicious concoction. Then, usually, even the kids who swore they would never try it, sneak a nibble. "You absolutely never ever **have** to like it. That's not a requirement for



Students chop vegetables during a Food for People cooking class.

you like or don't like about it." Knowing they don't have to enjoy a certain food – only try to describe it – helps relieve the burden of being polite, while also building a culinary vocabulary. If, then, they can identify what they enjoy and don't enjoy about certain foods, the children may be more likely to try new ones later on because of their increased confidence in articulating the experiences.

Don't get me wrong – every day is a food challenge and I don't get every child to try every food, every time. I still get some "no ways" and the 'are you crazy, woman?' looks. But, more often these days, I get an "Ooooookay" and "That wasn't so bad" and "Wow, I never knew it could taste like that," which keeps me encouraged. It's also fascinating – and sometimes adorable – to watch. To have

from hesitancy to thoughtfulness to surprise to joy while tasting a new food is utterly priceless. It allows me to see something I do not remember from my childhood. What **was** it like to taste the deliciousness of honey apples, tangerines and cinnamon together for the first time? What **was** it like to realize my friend tasted the bitterness of Brussels sprouts, but I did not? It makes coordinating Nutrition Education classes, particularly for children, that much more joyful. If you are at home doing this with your little ones – or in other capacities with

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